

Chesterfield Inlet...

Fifty years later

Chesterfield 1912: Igluligardjuk, «the place where there are a few igloos», a point at the outlet of an inlet which runs deep inland to the mouth of Baker Lake. The Eskimo have lived there periodically for centuries and have left behind ruins of shacks, camping sites and tombs. The Hudson's Bay Company, seeking furs, has just established an isolated outpost in the network which has reached further to the North with truly British tenacity for the past two and a half centuries. Standing in front of the Company post, one fine September day, a handful of long-haired Eskimo saw with astonishment two strange black-robed creatures, Fathers TURQUETIL and LEBLANC, lading from a ship...

Chesterfield 1962: The small Company house has been replaced with a row of white-walled, green-trimmed and red-roofed buildings. Alongside are a large mission house, a church, a hospital, a hostel, a federal school: then the RCMP quarters and those of the radio station and, here and there, small Eskimo houses sprouting aërials and various electrical wires. In these last days of April, the snow accumulated all winter long reaches the roofs. Decorations float in the wind, mingled with icy stalactites, hanging from the mission buildings. The Fathers, Sisters and Brothers are busy preparing all kinds of things and the hostel children can no

longer stand still. They will soon have news from their families, since all the missionaries of Hudson's Bay have a rendez-vous at the head mission on May first.

On the stated day the retreat begins, preached by Father Jean LARVOR, of the Province of Paris. Unfortunately, if the retreatmaster is there, only a few retreatants have been able to arrive on time. Today, as fifty years ago, the weather is king in this country and it is only two days later that weather conditions improve sufficiently so the plane can leave Churchill and pick up the missionaries living to the South. The ones from the North will not arrive until the 5th in the forenoon. For many of them it is a unique occasion to meet a « neighbour », one he has not seen for ten years or more.

Finally, every one has gathered around Bishop LACROIX and Father LAROCHELLE, Assistant General for the Oblates, who came from Rome. Our new Provincial, Father HARAMBURU, arrived just on time from Mackenzie. The only ones missing are three Fathers and a lay brother prevented by illness or pastoral work...

The retreat ended, synodal meetings begin, presided by the Vicar Apostolic. Most problems which are acute in the North country — which changes so quickly — are studied under the angle of happy and unhappy pressures which bear presently on the Eskimo and under the light of adapting missionary methods to new needs...

We expected also a large group of dignitaries and other guests. Bad weather delayed them too for a full day. Their plane finally arrived on the 11th between two snow squalls.

Archbishop Baudoux, of St. Boniface, fulfilled a long standing wish in coming to Hudson's Bay, of which he is Metropolitan. Two bishops accompanied him: Bishop BELLEAU, Vicar Apostolic of James Bay, whose diocese extends to the Southwest of

Hudson's Bay, and Bishop PICHÉ, Vicar Apostolic of Mackenzie, whose territory encompasses to the West all that remains of the Canadian Arctic. With them were the Provincials of Manitoba and of St. Francis-Xavier Province (Labrador and James Bay) and the Vicar General of Keewatin, Mother Leduc, Superior General of the Grey Nuns, whose daughters devoted their lives at Chesterfield for the past thirty years, had wanted to be with us, was accompanied by Mother Provincial.

During the triduum, the voices of the Metropolitan Archbishop, of the General Assistant and the Provincial, were heard in turns — in French, in English or in Eskimo — recalling to the audience gathered in Bishop TURQUETL's old church the significance of this anniversary, evoking the memory of the dead, stressing the lessons of gratitude, of faith and of trust related to these ceremonies. The Eskimos, whose numbers have been greatly reduced since their partial migration to the South, came to church in good numbers. Two survivors of the 1st group baptized in 1917 had joined them: Margaret Qalalak, who is now well over eighty and who has not lost her good mood, and John Ayaruar, mining settlement of Rankin Inlet.

On Thursday evening a dinner was served to all the Eskimo and to veteran missionaries in the hostel dining room. On Saturday, every one assembled in Joseph Bernier school to attend a well prepared concert presented by the students.

On the same day, Father Lionel DUCHARME, dean of the Hudson's Bay missionaries, had celebrated a solemn Requiem for the dead in the Vicariate. Archbishop Baudoux closed the festivities with a solemn High Mass.

Our guests intended to leave Southwards after the dinner served at the mission, but once more the weather turned bad, so much so that the plane which was to take them back did not come in until

Wednesday evening, which gave every one ample time to appreciate the charms, of springtime in the North: snow, blizzards, fog.. nothing was missing...

Then followed for three days the departures in all directions; the hostel children returning also to their own settlements.

On May 20th Chesterfield had found its usual calm. A page had been turned in the history of the Eskimo missions, a page richly adorned with trials and sacrifices, in comparison to which the result appear meager as to quantity, but are nonetheless consoling if one takes into account the difficulties met with.

Now all the missionary personnel has gone forward, full of confidence in the future and conscious of the needed adaptation effort to be made.